

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release February 23, 1975

Mulligan 202/343-5634

INJURIOUS WILDLIFE REGULATIONS PROPOSED

Revised draft regulations to control imports of injurious wildlife are being published in the Federal Register as proposed rulemaking by the Department of the Interior. A new draft environmental impact statement based on the revised version has been filed with the Council on Environmental Quality and is available to the public.

The Fish and Wildlife Service enforces several acts regarding imported wildlife. The Lacey Act and the Endangered Species Act are often confused. These current proposed regulations pertain to the Lacey Act, which is designed to control the introduction of wildlife to the United States which could be injurious to man, agriculture, or wildlife resources. The Endangered Species Act, on the other hand, is designed to protect animals threatened with extinction both in the United States and worldwide. Separate regulations implementing this Act have also been issued which prohibit the unauthorized trafficking of endangered species within the United States and between the United States and foreign countries.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is initiating the public review process for the second time because considerable changes were made in the original proposed regulations, published in December 1973. These changes were in response to the large volume of substantive comments received during the public review period on the original proposal.

Any exotic animal which, when imported, could threaten the welfare of human beings, agriculture, horticulture, forestry, or native wildlife is considered injurious wildlife. The proposed regulations would prohibit the importation of injurious wildlife except as permitted for scientific, educational, zoological, or medical purposes. The proposed regulations also contain a list of "low risk" wildlife which will be eligible for importation without a permit. The list can be changed as new evidence becomes available on the degree of risk associated with the importation of any species.

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Public comment is invited on the second proposal for the revision of the regulations. All comments received within 45 days after publication in the Federal Register will be considered. Comments should be addressed to Director (FWS/LE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 19183, Washington, D.C. 20036. Copies of the proposal and the draft environmental impact statement are available from the same address.

Comments on the first proposal came from several segments of the public and offered varied points of view. Some state agencies were concerned that the proposed regulations would interfere with their programs of importing exotic fish or game animals to be released in the wild. The medical research community was concerned that its supply of monkeys and other imported laboratory animals might be interrupted. Other scientists expressed alarm over the difficulty they might encounter bringing in research specimens from abroad. Zoo officials complained of red tape in obtaining permits. Serious amateur biologists, notably herpetologists and aquarium hobbyists felt that the proposed restrictions would close the doors on their hobbies. Importers and dealers in the pet trade felt that the regulations were far too severe. On the other hand, conservationists and most of the individuals who commented, favored the proposal, some objecting only that the regulations were not strict enough.

Where the comments indicated a faulty understanding of the proposal, the regulations were clarified. In response to some comments, important changes were made in the proposed regulations.

Copies of the proposed regulations and the draft environmental impact statement are available for public inspection during normal business hours at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Suite 600, 1612 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., and at the regional offices listed below.

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